

O'DEA HOUSE  
(Shoppell Design #216)  
5804 Rustan Street  
Berwyn Heights  
Prince George's County  
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-975

HABS  
MD  
17-BERHTS,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

O'DEA HOUSE  
(Shoppell Design #216)

HABS NO. MD-975

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MD  
17-BERHTS,  
1-

Location: 5804 Ruatan Street, Berwyn Heights, Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: Mrs. Alice O'Dea (of same address)

Present Use: private residence

Significance: The Shoppell Design #216 house, currently referred to as the O'Dea House, is representative of the early suburban development of Prince George's County, an important aspect of its late 19th-century growth. It is an excellent example of a middle-class Queen Anne style suburban dwelling house. As typical of suburban houses of this era, the design for the house came from a builder's pattern book. The pattern was distributed by the Cooperative Building Plan Association, Robert W. Shoppell architect and president, and was one of the first houses constructed in this community by the Charlton Heights Improvement Company, in 1888.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The O'Dea House was built in 1888 (according to county tax assessment records).
2. Architect: The design was developed by New York architect Robert W. Shoppell, and distributed under the name of the Cooperative Building Plan Association. Shoppell and his staff of fifty architects produced mail-order plans at extremely competitive prices.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The house was not sold until 1892 when the developer, Edward Graves, purchased this house himself, along with eleven others in the community. He leased it to the Alger family until it was sold in 1907. It continued to be used as a rental property for another thirty years. Finally, in 1939, it was sold to Lawrence and Alice O'Dea.

1892 Deed JWB 21:225, 14 April 1892  
Charlton Heights Improvement Company

- To  
Edward Graves (president)  
30 lots (most unimproved) including block 24,  
lots 26 and 27 in Charlton Heights, for  
\$40,000.
- 1907 Deed 41:407, 30 November 1907  
Edward and Katherine Graves of D.C.  
To  
Charles Shepard  
Block 24, lots 26 and 27 of Berwyn Heights as  
per plat JWB 10:309
- 1908 Deed 42:475, 10 April 1908  
Charles and Florence Shepard  
To  
Clara R.A. Nelson of Washington, D.C.  
Block 24, lots 26 and 27 Berwyn Heights
- 1913 Deed of Trust 87:259, 17 February 1913  
Clara R.A. Nelson of Prince George's County  
To  
Charles Nesbitt and Fred Siddons of  
Washington, D.C.  
Clara Nelson is indebted to Clara Ford Nesbitt  
for \$2,000, so to secure payment, a deed of  
trust is given to Nesbitt and Siddons. Block  
24, lots 26 and 27.
- 1921 Fred L. Siddons and Charles Nesbitt of  
Washington, D.C.  
To  
Nelson Wilson of Washington, D.C.  
Block 24, lots 26 and 27 of Berwyn Heights,  
acquired by deed of trust 87:259, after  
default by Clara Nelson.
- 1922 Deed 421:356, 18 February 1922  
Nelson Realty  
To  
Clara R.A. Nelson  
for \$1,000, Block 24, lots 26 and 27 in Berwyn  
Heights, acquired by 164:32
- 1934 Mortgage 429:117, 6 December 1934  
Clara R.A. Nelson  
To  
Homeowners Loan Corporation  
Block 24, lots 26 and 27 of Berwyn Heights,  
which she acquired by 421:356. Nelson is  
indebted to HOLC for \$2,400.
- 1937 Deed 432:8, 8 September 1937  
F.M. Hall

To  
Home Owners Loan Corporation  
Block 24, lots 26 and 27 of Berwyn Heights.  
Hall authorized to sell the property of Clara  
R.A. Nelson, who defaulted on a mortgage to  
HOLC, 429:117, sold to said Corporation which  
was the highest bidder at \$2,000.

1939        Deed 521:341, 19 April 1939  
            Home Owners Loan Corporation  
            To  
            Lawrence and Alice O'Dea for \$3,750, Block 24,  
            lots 26 and 27 of Berwyn Heights, as per Plat  
            JWB 10:309, same property as acquired by  
            482:8.

4. Builder, contractor:    The house was built by the  
Charlton Heights Improvement Company, Edward Graves,  
developer.    Graves' company used a number of R.W.  
Shoppell's designs to built model homes for Charlton  
Heights, later renamed Berwyn Heights, along the main  
street, Ruatan Street.

5. Original plans and construction:    The O'Dea House was  
taken from Shoppell's *Artistic Modern Houses at Low Cost*,  
design #216.

6. Alterations and additions:    Few changes have been made  
to the O'Dea House.    The only major changes include the  
following:    the rear porch off the kitchen was enclosed,  
the brick fireplace in the parlor was rebuilt and the  
mantel removed, the dinning room fireplace was closed  
over (through the mantel remains), and a pressed tin  
ceiling was added to the dining room in the 1940s.

#### B. Historical Context:

The O'Dea House was built during the height of the  
Victorian era in architecture, and the early phase of  
suburban development in Prince George's County.    Thus, it  
reflects the best that the period had to offer--the early  
ideals of what suburban living should be.    The suburban  
movement was getting underway in metropolitan areas  
throughout the country during this time.    Beginning in  
the 1870s and 1880s, commuter railroads--and later  
trolley lines--would feed from Washington, D.C., into the  
outlying areas.    With suburbanization came new  
architectural designs suited to larger, tree-filled lots

that reflected the country-like setting. The numerous pattern books produced during this period serve as testimony to the growing trend.

Washingtonian Edward Graves purchased 383 acres here in 1887, and in 1888 formed the Charlton Heights Improvement Company with the intent of developing a suburban community. The property was undoubtedly chosen for its close proximity to the Baltimore & Ohio's commuter rail into Washington. Graves hired the firm of Newby & Howell, Engineers & Surveyors of Washington, D.C., to survey the area and plat streets and lots for his residential community (Skarda, p. 18). The company immediately began building houses selected from mail-order pattern books.

Mail-order and pattern-book-design homes were largely a product of suburbanization. The rise of suburban development aimed at middle- and moderate-income families was in full swing during the 1880s and 1890s. This new growth created both the need for a innovative house type--something between a town house and a country house--and a way to provide house designs cheaply and in volume. Thus, mail-order plans and houses became one of the primary means for designing and building suburban housing.

George and Charles Palliser together are credited as the first "mail-order architect," providing a much needed service for moderate-income would-be homeowners who could not afford an architect's fee. The Pallisers published their first booklet, *Model Homes for the People, A Complete Guide to the Proper and Economical Erection of Buildings*, in 1876. It was so popular that two years later they published *Palliser's American Cottage Home*. Others soon picked up on their success (Gowans, pp. 41-43).

Robert W. Shoppell was one of the more successful to follow the Pallisers' lead. He began producing mail-order house designs in the early 1880s. He expanded to a staff of fifty architects--claiming to eliminate time-consuming correspondence by keeping a large staff on hand ready to prepare any conceivable variation on their standard plans. By the 1890s they had produced thousands of designs under the name of Cooperative Building Plan Association. The designs reflect the popular architectural trends of Victorian America with projecting

bays and towers, wrap-around porches, cross-gable roofs, polychromatic wall treatment, asymmetrical plans, and ornamental jig-sawn trim. Volume enabled Shoppell to offer high-style designs at middle-class prices. Shoppell's mail order plans included every necessary specification from detailed drawings to instructions for painting, and blank builders contracts. Three other Shoppell designs can also be found along Ruatan Street (Pearl, pp. 1-3).

Early transportation to and from Berwyn was furnished by the Washington Branch of the B&O Railroad. The first in the area to provide commuter service into the district, the B&O offered a commutation ticket for 180 round trips to Washington in 1896, for \$11.85 (Burch, p. 9). The B&O was later supplemented by electric streetcars, beginning in September of 1900, when the first streetcar service was initiated by City & Suburban Railway, extending its track from Riverdale along Rhode Island Avenue to Berwyn and into the district (Skarda, p. 33).

The community, initially known as Charlton Heights, contained approximately twenty houses after the first year. Interest, however, soon tapered off so that in 1892 the Charlton Improvement Company ceased operations. Then, in 1896, the town was incorporated as Berwyn Heights. Growth continued, although slowly. A large percentage of the current residences were developed in the 1950s.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The O'Dea House is an excellent, intact example of a Queen Anne-style suburban residence of moderate means. Its most interesting feature is its octagonal facade which telescopes upward three stories. Also of note are its wall treatment which incorporates wood siding with shingles in both a cut-out scallop and fishscale pattern, various crossing roof types, the half-timbering in the gable ends, and decorative porch brackets. This design was described by Shoppell as having "fine, large rooms, a well lighted hall and stairway, good closet room, bathroom, back stairway, cellar and a very comfortable and attractive veranda" (*Artistic Modern Houses of Low Cost*, by R.W.

Shoppell, President, Cooperative Building Plan Assoc, N.Y., 1888).

2. Condition of fabric: The house appears to be in very good condition. The integrity of the exterior design is without compromise.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The rectangular house consists of a two-and-a-half-story, side-gabled main block measuring approximately 28' x 26', with a two-and-a-half-story telescoping octagon with wrap around porch to the center of the front facade. An extended bay is located to the west side of the main block. To the north rear and east side is a two-story kitchen section with a wall dormer and a pyramidal roof.

2. Foundations: The house rests on a brick foundation.

3. Walls: The walls are sided in a variety of materials, beginning on the first story with wood siding with corner boards. The second story has cut-out wood shingles which give the overall effect of hexagons. The wall surface on the second story overhangs slightly with flared eaves. The third or half story has fishscale shingles. In the gable end of the middle section is half-timbering.

4. Structural system framing: The house is of wood frame, balloon construction.

5. Porches: A porch wraps around the octagonal front of the house. It is supported by squared posts and balustrade with decorative brackets, and is open at the south front and in the southeast corner near the front entry. The rear porch along the west wall of the kitchen wing has been enclosed.

6. Chimneys: The house has two chimneys. The principal chimney, which feeds the parlor and dining room fireplaces, is located at an angle aligned with the northwest side of the octagon. The second chimney feeds the kitchen cooking facilities and is an interior end chimney to the center of the rear of the kitchen section. Both are brick with a corbelled top.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entry is to the east of the octagon, on the south front of the middle section. It has a plain board surround. The door has twelve panels and there is a screen door with decorative spindle work. There is a rear doorway off the enclosed kitchen porch, a modern addition.

b. Windows: The typical window is a one-over-one-light-sash with plain board surrounds (shorter in the half story of the octagon). At the west side of the middle section is a three-sided extended bay with narrow one-over-one-light-sash windows. Also in the gable ends of this section are two small twenty-light casement windows.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The three sections of the house all have different roofs that intersect with each other. The front section has an octagonal roof with an acorn-like finial atop it. Because the top, third section of the roof is smaller than the first and second (same size), there is an octagonal pent roof between the two sections. The porch of the first story below mimics the others with the same roof type. The middle section has a side-gabled roof. The roof of the kitchen wing to the rear is pyramidal, with a shed roof enclosed porch along the side wall. All are covered with composition shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: The O'Dea House has a boxed cornice, which forms a pediment at the gable ends, with crown molding. The frieze board beneath it curves in a concave direction. There is an eave between the clapboard first story and the shingled second story, formed as the end of the second story wall flares out over the first. There is crown molding under the eaves here as well.

c. Dormers: There is a single wall dormer along the east wall of the kitchen section. It has a gable roof with crown molding, and a one-over-one-light-sash window with a plain surround.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The O'Dea House enters into an L-shaped hall. There is an archway near the crux of the L, beyond which lies the stairway. To the west side, there is a doorway into the octagonal parlor. At the far end of the L-shaped hall is the doorway into the dining room. The irregularly shaped dining room adjoins the parlor to the south, the hall and library to the east, and the kitchen to the north. The dining room has a fireplace and a bay window. The kitchen has a back stair in the southeast corner (with the stair to the cellar underneath), and a doorway onto an enclosed porch to the west side.

b. Second floor: The second floor follows the same basic plan with a bedroom over the parlor and dining rooms, and an L-shaped hall. The stairway continues to the third floor in the same manner. There is a bathroom off the hallway, behind the stair. At the end of the hall is the back bedroom over the kitchen (step down).

c. Third floor: The third floor is smaller in scale, but like the two previous floors, has a bedroom over the parlor and dinning rooms. Over the second-floor bath is an unfinished attic space.

2. Stairways: There is both a main and back stairway. The main stairway is a very elaborate, two-flight, closed-string stair which rises up three stories. The stair begins along the east wall and then winds around ninety degrees and continues along north wall. On the second story, an open-well balustrade runs east-west, and then repeats the same pattern to the third story. The stair has a heavy, chamfered newel post, turned on a diagonal, with bulls-eye ornamentation and a large rounded newel cap. The second floor intermediate posts extend with finals. There is a heavy, molded hand rail and turned balusters. The back stair, from the kitchen to the bedroom above, is enclosed, with winders.

3. Flooring: The house has wooden flooring in the first floor, with the exception of linoleum tile in the entry hall. There is (sheet) linoleum in the second story.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are plaster, with the exception of the dining room ceiling which is covered with pressed metal in a squared recessed-panel pattern.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doorways have multi-band molding with bull's-eye corner blocks. The doors are wooden four-panel doors.

b. Windows: The windows have the same molding as the doorways.

6. Decorative features, trim: The mantel in the dinning room has a Queen Anne mantel with tiered shelves. There is a bracketed mantel shelf with an over mantel mirror.

7. Lighting: The house was originally electrified ca. 1935 with one plug per room and one pull-chain ceiling light fixture. The wiring has been updated since.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and orientation: The house faces south, with its orientation to Ruatan Street. A sidewalk runs from the center of the porch to the street.

2. Historic landscape design: Although the community was laid out in lots in 1888, most of the surrounding property remained undeveloped until the 1950s. The current resident claims that when the family moved here in 1939 you could see the Capitol at night from the third floor bedroom.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interviews: Lawrence O'Dea (son of current owner), March 28, 1989, 5804 Ruatan Street, Berwyn Heights, Maryland.

B. Bibliography:

Burch, Raymond. History and Development of the City of College Park, Berwyn Heights, Greenbelt and Adjacent Areas (City of College Park, 1970).

Gowans, Alan. The Comfortable House, North American Suburban Architecture, 1890-1930. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987.

Pearl, Susan G. (Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission). Maryland Historical Trust, State Historic Sites Inventory Form, Charlton Heights House, Shoppell Design #216 (O'Dea House), August 1986.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Victorian Pattern Book Houses in Prince George's County," Friends of Preservation Newsletter, Spring 1989, pp. 1-2.

Skarda, D.D. Berwyn Heights; History of a Small Maryland Town (Town of Berwyn Heights).

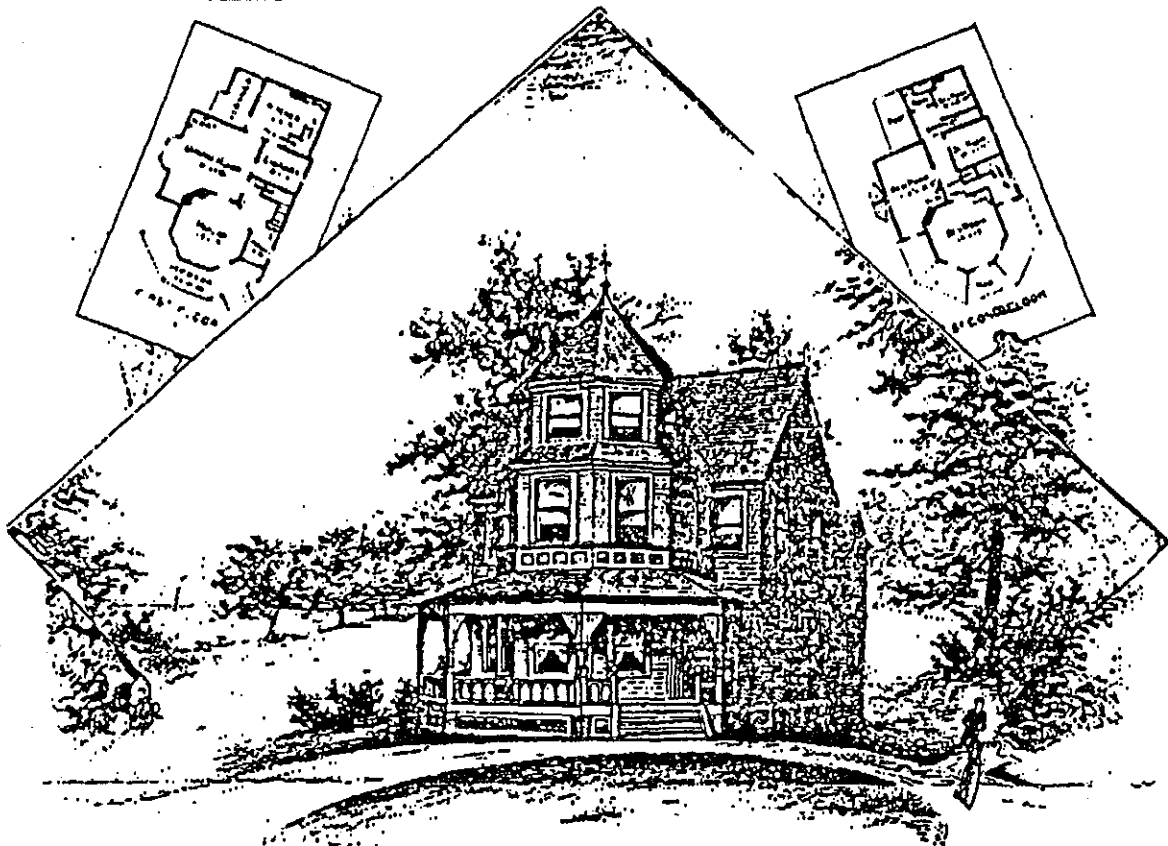
#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of Charlton Heights House, Shoppell Design #216 (the O'Dea House) was part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission on behalf of the Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to document select sites throughout the county. A memorandum of Agreement was signed in August of 1988 and the project, to span one year, began in January of 1989. Gail Rothrock, director and Susan Pearl, research historian of the HPC made the site selections. They also provided access to their historical research and information, as well as their knowledge of county history. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. The historical report was prepared by HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie who also accompanied the photographer into the field for on site investigation.

Figure #1 Shoppell Design #216 (Reproduced in Susan G. Pearl. *Victorian Pattern Book Houses in Prince George's County, Maryland*. Historic Preservation Commission, Planning Dept., M-NCPPC, Prince George's County, Maryland, Spring 1988, pg. 29).

ARTISTIC MODERN HOUSES OF LOW COST.

By R. W. SHOPPELL, President of the Co-operative Building Plan Association, Architects, New York.



PERSPECTIVE VIEW OF DESIGN NO. 216.  
DESCRIPTION OF DESIGN NUMBER 216.

THIS house has five large rooms, a well lighted hall and stairway, good closet room, bath-room, back stairway, cellar, and a very attractive and comfortable veranda.

A veranda should be low and broad so that it will be shady, and thus answer the purpose for which it is designed. The posts should be spaced a good distance apart so that they will not obstruct the view.

In the attic story (plan not shown) there is one small bedroom and one large room; the latter is large enough for a small billiard table, and is a good place of entertainment for the gentlemen who smoke. The color of the wood is thus confined to the top of the house or escapes to the open air through the windows. When wife and daughters assure us that they "like the fragrance of a good cigar," it is well to credit them with this mental reservation: they do not like the dead odor to "hang around" for days, in curtains, carpets and upholstery. A secluded room like this is desirable for other purposes. It makes a fine study for student or minister; a good studio for an artist; a play-room for children; a sewing-room or a "growlery" where the man of the house can look over the bills and figure up expenses.

Below will be found dimensions, cost, etc.:

SIZE OF STRUCTURE: Front, 27 ft., 8 in.; Bay projects, 1 ft. Side, 43 ft., 2 in. Veranda projects, 5 ft., 6 in.

SIZE OF MANSION: See floor plans.

HEIGHT OF STORIES: Cellar, 6 ft., 6 in.; First Story, 9 ft., 3 in.; Second Story, 8 ft., 9 in.; Third Story, 8 ft.

Figure 11. Artistic Modern

MATERIALS: Foundation, brick and stone; First Story, clapboards; Second Story, shingled; Gables, shingled; Roof, shingled.

COST: \$2,375 to \$3,075, according to prices for materials and labor in different localities; all complete.

GUARANTEED ESTIMATES: For those who order Working Plans and Specifications for this design, or for any design published by the Co-operative Building Plan Association, which none of their designs can be well built, nor can be kept within the estimates, the Association will make a special estimate based on local prices for material and labor. The Association guarantees that a contract can be placed at figures not exceeding the special estimate, otherwise, they will charge nothing for their services.

Correspondence solicited. Address the Co-operative Building Plan Association, Architects, 63 Broadway, N. Y.

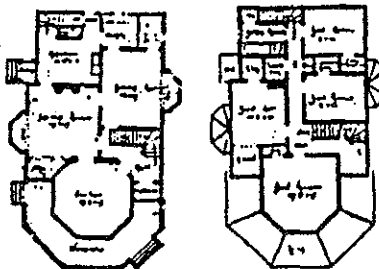
MODIFICATIONS: The Association has the following modifications of the above design:

Design No. 216, reversed: precisely the same as above except that the plans are reversed.

Design No. 344: same exterior as No. 216, tower a little higher. Plans a little deeper. First floor differently arranged, as shown by the plan given. Cost, \$3,000 to \$4,000.

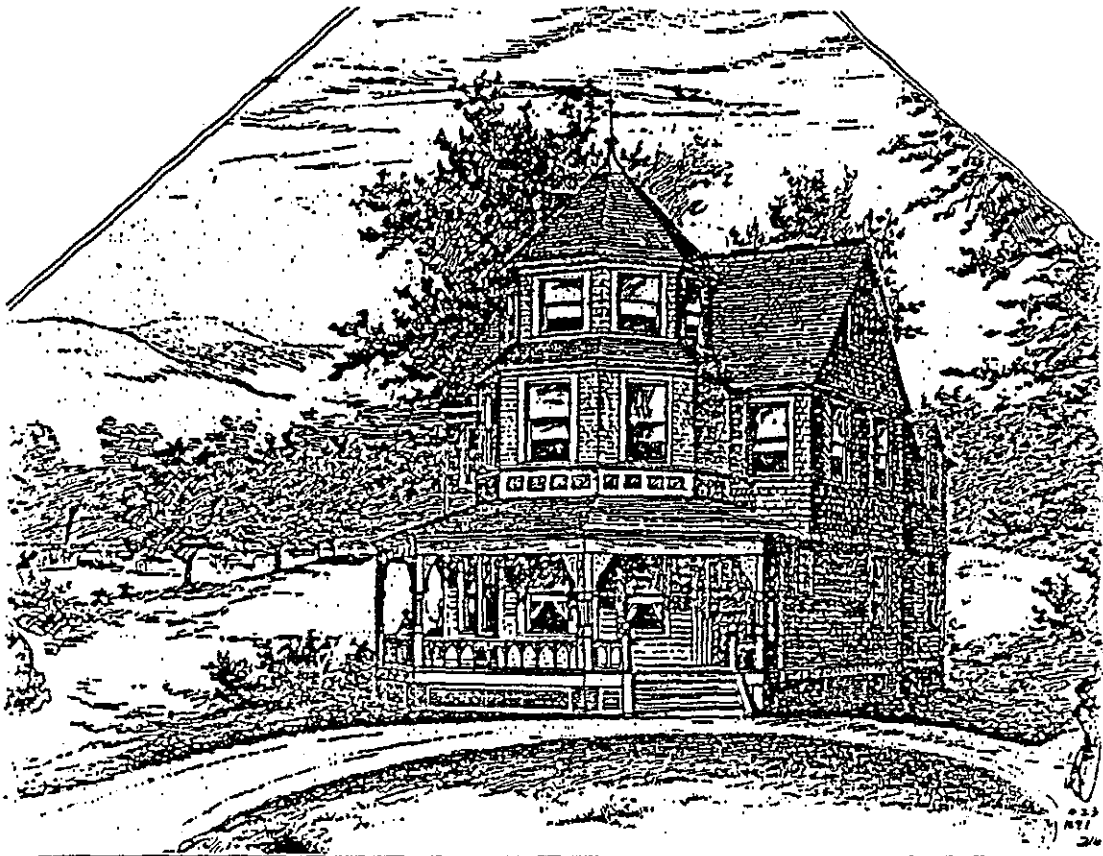
Design No. 344, reversed: same as above.

Houses of Low Cost, 1888



FIRST AND SECOND FLOOR PLANS OF DESIGN NO. 216.

Figure #2 Shoppell Design #216 (Ibid., pg. 30).



### DESCRIPTION.

For explanation of all symbols (\* & etc.) see page 10.

**GENERAL DIMENSIONS:** Width, 30 ft. 6 in.; depth including veranda, 48 ft. 8 in. Heights of stories, Cellar, 6 ft. 6 in.; first story, 9 ft. 3 in.; second story, 8 ft. 9 in.; attic, 8 ft.

**EXTERIOR MATERIALS:** Foundations, stone and brick; first story, clapboards; second story, gables and roof, shingles; tower, panels and shingles. Outside blinds to all windows except those of the cellar.

**INTERIOR FINISH:** Hard white plaster; plaster cornices in hall, parlor and dining room. Soft wood floor and trim. Ash staircase. Panels under hall and dining room windows. Bath-room wainscoted. Interior wood-work finished in hard oil.

**COLORS:** Clapboards, blinds and sashes, bronze green. Trim, outside doors, veranda floor, and rain conductors, seal brown. Veranda ceiling, chrome yellow. Brick-work, Indian red. Wall shingles dipped and brush coated sienna stain. Roof shingles dipped and brush coated Indian red stain.

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** The principal rooms and their sizes, closets, etc., are shown by the plans. Cellar under kitchen. Tower room finished in attic. This room makes a pleasant study or smoking room. Bay window in dining room. Back stairway, bath-room and servant's bedroom over kitchen. Fireplace and one hard wood mantel included in estimate.

**COST:** \$2,804, not including range and heater. The estimate is based on New York prices for materials and labor. In many sections of the country the cost should be less.

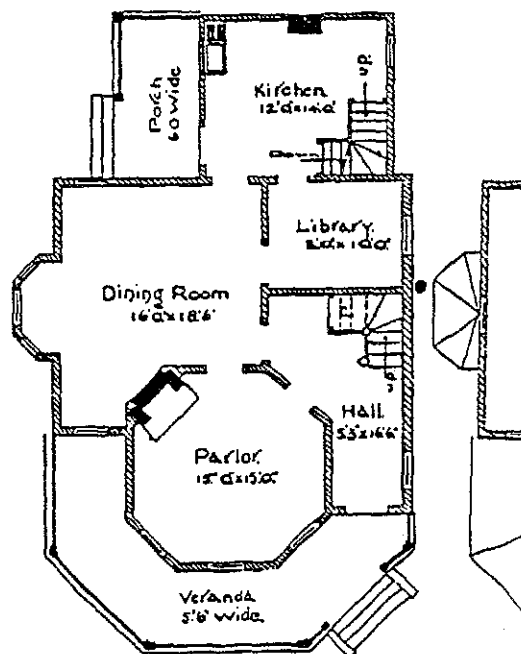
Price for working plans, specifications and \* license to build

\$20.00

Price for \* bill of materials.

5.00

Address, THE CO-OPERATIVE BUILDING PLAN ASSOCIATION, Architects, Broadway, New York.



FIRST FLOOR.

**FEASIBLE MODIFICATIONS:** The rooms and kinds of materials as extended under whole house. As fireplaces and mantels may be used one chimney will suffice.